

Remarks of Rep. Henry A. Waxman
South Coast Air Quality Management District
Powering the Future Policy Forum
June 21, 2012

Thank you for inviting me to speak today.

It is truly an honor for me to be here. The South Coast Air Quality Management District plays a unique role in protecting air quality in California ... in the United States ... and in the world.

California is the world leader in air pollution control. And the South Coast is the leader in California.

And the South Coast Air Quality Management District has a great leader in Barry Wallerstein.

The topic of today's conference has long been an interest of mine – the technologies that can enable cleaner air. Cleaner energy and transportation technologies are the way we meet air quality standards while maintaining vibrant industries. Conversely, clean air standards are often necessary to spur adoption of these technologies.

We need technological advances to make the air safe to breath, and we need strong health-based standards to create the right incentives for industry to produce these new technologies.

And when get this balance right, we get both clean air and a strong economy. And that should be a goal that both Democrats and Republicans can embrace.

Environmental protection has a long history of bipartisanship. Theodore Roosevelt is known as the "Conservationist President." Richard Nixon created the Environmental Protection Agency and signed the original Clean Air Act into law.

During my career, I've worked with Republicans and Democrats from across the country to find solutions to air pollution problems like acid rain, stratospheric ozone protection, and urban smog.

I am proud of this record. When Congress passed the Clean Air Act Amendments of 1990, some of my greatest allies were Republicans like Jerry Lewis from California, Sherry Boehlert from New York, Ed Madigan from Illinois, and Jim Jeffords from Vermont.

And of course, President George H.W. Bush signed the legislation into law and was one of the heroes of the 1990 law.

The fundamental problem today is that this bipartisanship has broken down.

This Congress, the House of Representatives has become the most anti-environmental House in the history of our nation. So far this Congress, the House has voted 247 times to weaken our nation's environmental laws.

The number one target has been the Clean Air Act. The House has voted 77 times to undermine Clean Air Act protections. The House has voted to repeal the health-based standards that are the heart of the Clean Air Act. The House has voted to block EPA regulation of toxic emissions from power plants ... incinerators ... cement plants ... industrial boilers ... and mining operations.

The House has even voted to deny that climate change is occurring.

Almost every one of these bills to wipe out air quality regulations has passed the House on a deep partisan divide.

Twenty-one years after the 1990 Clean Air Act Amendments passed the House by 401 to 21, it is a brave Republican in Washington who calls for cleaning up air pollution.

It is my hope that this will prove to be a temporary aberration.

The Washington Post released a poll yesterday that showed that the vast majority of Americans think our environment is getting worse. Despite the partisanship in Washington, Americans of all parties want clean air and clean water. They want Congress to be working together to strengthen our environmental laws – not voting to undermine our landmark environmental laws.

In 2010, we celebrated the 40th birthday of the Clean Air Act. In 1970, Americans could literally see the air pollution. When a bus went by, you were choked by the fumes. Parents had to keep their kids indoors in the summer because the air wasn't safe to breathe. There were also problems we didn't even know about then. Acid rain killing our lakes and forests . . . the hole in the ozone layer . . . and global warming.

With the critical exception of carbon pollution, the air is much cleaner now. Even though Southern California is still the most polluted region in the country, the air there is better now than it has ever been in the past. These improvements didn't happen by themselves. They were required by laws adopted by large bipartisan majorities and regulations written by both Democratic and Republican administrations.

Congress has required several detailed cost-benefit assessments of Clean Air Act programs, which EPA has developed with extensive peer review. Independent panels of

distinguished economists, scientists, and public health experts provided in-depth assessment and advice throughout the studies' design, implementation, and documentation.

Here is what they found. From 1990 to 2010, the benefits of the Clean Air Act exceeded costs by a 4-to-1 margin. By 2020, the public health benefits of the Clean Air Act are projected to reach \$2 trillion.

We have reduced major pollutants by two-thirds while our economy has tripled in size. That proves we can have both clean air and economic growth.

These cost-benefit estimates quantify the avoided costs of air pollution. In essence, they look at the costs that cleaner air allows us to avoid -- costs to the health care system, missed work days and school days, and premature deaths. They reflect the reality that Clean Air Act regulations mean that our children have fewer aggravated asthma attacks, there are fewer hospital visits for respiratory illness, fewer Americans die prematurely, and workers are on the job, rather than home sick in bed.

The Clean Air Act has also helped grow our economy in other ways. America has been the world leader in regulating air pollution. As a consequence, we are the world leader in developing and manufacturing air pollution control technology.

In the United States, 120,000 companies are engaged in the environmental technology business. In 2008, the U.S. environmental protection technology industry generated \$300 billion in revenues, \$40 billion in exports, and supported close to 2 million jobs. Clean air is something that every country wants, and because we led the way, we're able to supply it to them.

Those jobs, technologies, and investment are especially important for Southern California.

But we still have to do more. On the national level, the most urgent priority must be to address carbon pollution that is causing climate change. If we don't, the fires, droughts, and floods that have been afflicting our nation will intensify.

California has a new law that uses a market-based cap-and-trade system for reducing carbon emissions in California. This shows that once again, California is leading the nation.

But there are some problems that California and the South Coast cannot address on their own. Over 40 percent of U.S. imports come into the country through the ports of Los Angeles and Long Beach. The air pollution from the ships, planes, trains, trucks, and loading equipment is a big reason for Southern California's air quality problems.

But the South Coast and other communities need federal support to reduce these emissions. There need to be effective federal standards to help reduce these emissions. And we need federal transportation policies that support local efforts to reduce emissions.

A good model for addressing these issues is the historic cooperation of the EPA, the Department of Transportation, and California under the leadership of President Obama. As a result of these efforts, EPA and DOT have issued landmark carbon pollution and fuel economy standards that apply through 2016. They are now working to finalize an additional set of standards that would apply from 2017 to 2025.

These standards will double vehicle fuel efficiency. And they are supported by the environmental community. . . the auto industry . . . consumer groups . . . national security hawks . . . and California and other states. When they are finalized, they will reduce carbon pollution by 2 billion metric tons over the lifetime of the vehicles. They will reduce our dependence on oil by 4 billion barrels of oil, keeping money in the American economy each year, rather than shipping it overseas to countries that are not our friends. They will save consumers, on average, an additional \$4,400 in fuel costs over the lifetime of the new vehicles.

And American auto companies are enjoying a renaissance, thanks in part to their new more fuel efficient vehicles.

I am a pessimist about this Congress. As I said earlier, this is the most anti-environment House of Representatives in history.

But I don't think we need to be pessimistic about the future and our environment. California has shown again and again that we can have both clean air and a strong economy. And the South Coast has always been the leader in this effort.

This conference, I hope, will be able to address these issues and provide guidance to federal policymakers in Congress and the agencies.

We need to bring to Washington the optimism and can-do spirit that has been the guiding light of air pollution policies in California. And this event is a good place to start.